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**Title:**

Press statement from the Minister for Labor and Immigration: Support for Mr Egerton's  
remarks on trade unions

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# press statement

FROM THE MINISTER FOR LABOR  
AND IMMIGRATION  
MR. CLYDE CAMERON

## SUPPORT FOR MR EGERTON'S REMARKS ON TRADE UNIONS

16 August 1974

I support Jack Egerton when he says the trade union movement is at its lowest ebb with the general public. There seems to be some quite absurd thinking in some union circles about the question of public interest; the term "general public" is used as if it was some foreign enemy. In fact it includes some four-and-a-half million people who have to work for a living, and more than two-and-a-half million of them are fellow union members. That is what I meant when I talk about the public interest — not just some amorphous body bent on destroying organised labour, but something that includes organised labour.

I have never hesitated to support unions when I feel they are right. Equally, I think it is my duty to oppose them when I think they are wrong, and I think many of them are acting wrongly now.

The Australian Government has been directly responsible for some notable advances in working conditions for union members. Within seventeen months of coming to office, this Government's intervention before the Arbitration Commission was directly responsible for achieving a total increase of \$17.00 a week in the Minimum Wage. In the same period, Government intervention succeeded in completing the process towards equal pay — including the extension of the Minimum Wage to females. It was the Government's case for the restoration of quarterly cost-of-living adjustments that was primarily responsible for today's situation in which wage indexation is now almost a fait accompli. Our action in extending four weeks' annual leave to Australian public servants hastened the extension of this reform to the point that even in Queensland we have recently witnessed it flowing to State employees.

In the short period we have been in office, we have ratified ten ILO Conventions, and become the first Government in the southern hemisphere to extend the ILO Convention on maternity leave to its own employees. We are the first Government in the world to give paid paternity leave to husbands of those qualified for maternity leave. We have introduced a uniform code for industrial safety for all Commonwealth Departments, and but for Senate obstruction we would have already altered the law to facilitate union amalgamations; repealed the out-dated and abrasive strike penalties; and would now have a Workers Compensation Act for Commonwealth employees which would have guaranteed full compensation for life to injured workers and a life pension to widows plus lump sum payments for specified injuries. The Government is currently studying the feasibility of establishing an Australian Stevedoring Industry Corporation to cover all stevedoring operations by a publicly-owned corporation, in lieu of the variety of foreign-owned private companies which now cover the industry; and means by which the anomalies created by the Moore and Doyle case can be overcome.

I have already succeeded in getting Government support for the establishment of an Australian Council for Trade Union Training with an annual budget of \$3 million in the determination to make the Australian trade union movement the most enlightened and efficient in the world.

Although I haven't yet made a public announcement on the matter, I can today announce that the Australian Government will be intervening in the power union's application for a 35-hour week in their industry to support the union's case.

My department is studying ways and means by which bankruptcy laws can be amended so that wage and other entitlements due to workers will take absolute priority over all other creditors, including the Taxation Commissioner. No other Government in the history of Australia has done so much for those who elected it to office, than this Government has done for those who elected it to office — the Australian workers. But our prime responsibility must always remain to maintain economic conditions that ensure everyone who wants to work will have a job available.

Thus the Australian Government sees it as being in the public interest that employers who grant special and excessive wage increases to small sectors of the workforce should not be allowed to force the other four-and-a-half million members of the workforce to pay the cost of that excessive increase in excessive prices. When 500 brewery workers receive a much higher wage increase than any other workers doing similar jobs, the 400,000 workers who drink beer in Western Australia are forced to dig deeper into their pockets just to pay the excessive rise, plus the extra profit for the bosses on the extra wage.

We are now witnessing the development of a situation where employers and some unions are acting jointly in an attempt to get the Australian Government to lift the guidelines which ask that the Prices Justification Tribunal reject price rises based on these higher-than-normal wage increases. This exemplifies the selfishness of certain sections of the trade union movement — they seem to see nothing wrong with forcing more than four million of their fellow workers to pay more than they ought to for some given commodity or service in order that some minute section of the workforce should get wage rises that go above their fair share, and which go well beyond price movements.

This is why the Government is supporting the reintroduction of automatic quarterly cost-of-living wage adjustments, so that all workers everywhere will receive automatically a wage rise equivalent to price movements that will preserve that portion of his income needed for his family needs. In this time of rapidly rising inflation, we have to avoid adding to the inflationary spiral by indexing that portion of very high wages which represents luxury expenditure.

The general public — including that section of the public that consists of trade unionists themselves — are sick and tired of the near anarchy that pervades the Australian industrial scene. It is this bloody-mindedness on the part of a small section of the trade union movement that is slowly, but surely, pricing thousands of Australian workers out of employment. If unemployment reaches unacceptable levels, it will not be due to any conscious decision taken by the Australian Government, but by the indirect efforts of the action of some union officials.

I can understand and support trade union demands for wage increases to counter the erosion of wage values by price movements — many of them caused by excessive mark-ups and profits. But given automatic wage adjustments for price rises, there will not be the need for excessive demands to meet anticipated future price rises.

CLYDE R CAMERON

16 August 1974

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